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Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives
Organizational session
New York, 19-22 May 1998
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Preparations for the special session

Proposals on the preparatory process of the special session

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution 50/161, the General Assembly decided to hold a special session in the year 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and to consider further actions and initiatives. In its resolution 52/25, the Assembly established a Preparatory Committee, which will hold an organizational session from 19 to 22 May 1998. The present report has been prepared in response to resolution 52/25, in which the Assembly requested that the Secretary-General prepare the necessary documentation of the Preparatory Committee at its organizational session, and in particular provide a report containing recommendations and proposals on the organization of the work of the Preparatory Committee.

The report contains proposals by the Secretary-General on the scope of the review by the Preparatory Committee and consideration of further initiatives, and on the roles of intergovernmental bodies, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations in the preparatory process of the special session. The report also contains proposals on dates for the Preparatory Committee's substantive sessions in 1999-2000, and for the special session itself in the year 2000.

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The report concludes that the objective of the special session should not be to renegotiate existing agreements contained in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the Summit but to provide an opportunity for Governments and other actors in the development process to adopt concrete measures and identify additional means for implementing the goals set by the Summit, and to renew the political impetus to foster social progress in all societies.

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate

1. In its resolution 50/161 of 22 December 1995, the General Assembly endorsed the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, which were adopted on 12 March 1995. By the same resolution, the Assembly, at the request of the Summit, also decided to hold a special session in the year 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit and to consider further actions and initiatives.

2. In its resolution 51/202, the Assembly set out the organizational process of the special session, and in its resolution 52/25, it established a Preparatory Committee, open to the participation of all States Members of the United Nations and members of the specialized agencies, with the participation of observers in accordance with the established practice of the Assembly. The Assembly also decided that the Preparatory Committee will hold an organizational session of four days' duration, from 19 to 22 May 1998.

3. In its resolution 52/25, the General Assembly decided that, at its organizational session, the Preparatory Committee will decide on the process to be followed to achieve the purpose of the special session with respect to an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit, and the consideration of further actions and initiatives. The Committee was requested to decide, *inter alia*, on the programme and organization of its work, including such issues as documentation, national contributions and input from the United Nations system, the election of its Bureau, the participation of non-governmental organizations, the dates for the special session and other organizational issues.

4. The present report has been prepared in response to the Assembly's request that the Secretary-General prepare the necessary documentation for the Preparatory Committee at its organizational session, and in particular provide a report containing recommendations and proposals on the organization of the work of the Committee.

B. Objectives of the special session

5. Bearing in mind the Assembly's decision to hold a special session for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit and to consider further actions and initiatives, the main purposes of the special session, therefore, seem to be to reaffirm the agreements reached at the Summit and to extend the relevance and practical implications of those agreements into the new millennium.

6. Although the primary framework for discussion at the special session will be the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, its commitments and related policy measures, the discussion could, in the light of new and evolving circumstances, focus on identifying innovative and concrete proposals.

II. Scope of the review and consideration of further initiatives

A. National reporting

7. The World Summit for Social Development recognized that social development and the implementation of the Programme of Action were primarily the responsibility of Governments, although international cooperation and assistance were essential for the creation of a favourable environment and a better implementation of national policies.

8. The General Assembly, in its resolutions 50/161, 51/202 and 52/25, reiterated the call of the Summit for Governments to assess on a regular basis progress towards implementing the outcome of the Summit, and encouraged them to submit such information on a voluntary basis to the Commission for Social Development.

9. For the purpose of review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit at the national level, the Preparatory Committee may wish to consider ways in which national implementation of Summit commitments could be promoted and supported, including through international cooperation. It may wish to request Governments to provide national reports outlining progress made and obstacles encountered in realizing the commitments, as well as to make proposals on further actions and initiatives for consideration at the special session.

10. To assist Governments in this endeavour, the Secretariat would formulate guidelines and structure and Governments would be requested to describe national efforts, including national plans of action and policies and to assess the progress made. Based on those reports from Governments and its own sources of information, the Secretariat would undertake an analysis of the overall level of implementation of the provisions of the Summit, and

would identify constraints, obstacles, successes and lessons learned. A comprehensive report would be presented to the Preparatory Committee at its substantive session in the year 2000. The report would include proposals for strengthening the national capacity of countries to achieve the goals and objectives of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the Summit.

B. Assessment of global trends

11. In order to provide the Preparatory Committee and the special session with the most up-to-date and comprehensive but concise overview of global trends, as a background to their deliberations, it is proposed to bring forward to early 2000 the publication of the next quadrennial report on the world social situation, originally scheduled for early 2001. A restructured and streamlined report would focus on cross-cutting and intersectoral issues and concerns, both national and international, particularly on significant changes in trends perceived since the Summit, thus facilitating consideration of possible further actions and initiatives at the special session.

C. Possible issues for discussion

12. One significant feature of global opinion since the Summit has been the increasing attention being accorded to social issues by Governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector. Many examples were included in the reports by Governments that were summarized in the report of the Secretary-General on implementation of the outcome of the Summit (A/52/305). Other recent examples have been the growing number of developing countries that have set themselves poverty reduction targets and related comprehensive poverty reduction strategies, for example, in China; the change in the central focus of the World Bank to poverty eradication; the revision of the Charter of the European Union negotiated in Amsterdam in 1997 by adding a chapter on employment; the state-of-the-Union address by the President of the United States of America to the United States Congress in January 1998, which was principally concerned with social policy; and the attendance of over 120 countries – the largest number ever – at the thirty-sixth session of the Commission for Social Development, in February 1998, which focused on social integration.

13. This increasing attention is not surprising in view of the continuing desperate seriousness of many social problems. The absolute number of people living in poverty continues to rise (see A/52/573). The International Labour Organization estimates that close to a billion people – approximately 30 per cent of the entire global workforce – are either unemployed or underemployed.[1] Many countries are experiencing forms of family, community, regional or ethnic conflict that continue to undermine social integration. In some countries, social and economic deterioration has occurred since 1995 due to civil wars, financial crisis or other political or economic disruption. The resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session on such topics as poverty, micro credit, global partnership for development, global financial flows, external debt, crime prevention, refugees, racism and terrorism are strong statements on those continuing crises.

14. Although all countries that have reported to the Secretary-General on action taken to implement Summit commitments have changed national social and economic policy, it is too early for most such changes to have had readily measurable effects. Review of those changes will be one of the tasks of the preparatory process leading up to the special session. However, there can be no dispute with the conclusion that major concrete additional national and international initiatives are essential for rapid movement towards the goals set at Copenhagen; the preparation of such initiatives will be the central task of the special session.

15. It will be essential for the Preparatory Committee to agree at its organizational session on an agenda for its first substantive session and to indicate areas of concern and issues on which background work should be undertaken. Possible frameworks for the agenda could be the three core issues addressed by the Summit or the five chapters that make up the Programme of Action. A more attractive possibility would be to use the 10 commitments made at Copenhagen as the framework for discussion: these were the core negotiated achievements of the Summit and it would be logical to base discussion at the special session on them. Although they vary in breadth, the commitments generally have a clarity of intent that would assist in keeping preparation and debate clearly focused.

16. The 10 commitments may be summarized as follows:

- *Commitment 1*. To create a national and international economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development.
- *Commitment 2*. To eradicate absolute poverty in the world through decisive national actions and international cooperation by a target date to be set by each country.

- *Commitment 3*. To promote the goal of full employment as a basic policy goal.
- *Commitment 4*. To promote social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just, and that are based on the enhancement and protection of all human rights.
- *Commitment 5*. To achieve equality and equity between women and men.
- *Commitment 6*. To attain universal and equitable access to quality education and primary health care.
- *Commitment 7*. To accelerate the development of Africa and the least developed countries.
- *Commitment 8*. To ensure that structural adjustment programmes include social development goals.
- *Commitment 9*. To increase significantly and/or utilize more efficiently resources allocated to social development.
- *Commitment 10*. To strengthen cooperation for social development through the United Nations and other multilateral institutions.

17. Rereading these commitments is a powerful reminder of the strength of the goals set at the Summit and the extent to which further action is required in order to implement them. Some progress has been made towards most of them, but much more action is needed on all of them. Examples of issues relating to each of the commitments that the preparatory process might wish to consider include:

1.1. What are the most serious national and international constraints on social development, and how can they be most effectively eliminated or reduced?

1.2. What are the implications of increasing international integration for social policy and development? How can the benefits be maximized and the costs be minimized? In particular, how can countries with little capacity to respond to more open markets or attract private finance be enabled to benefit?

1.3. What are the additional types of public goods and services that can only be efficiently provided internationally and cooperatively?

1.4. What additional steps can be taken to offset the more serious forms of market failure?

1.5. How can the effectiveness and efficiency of delivery of public services be further improved?

2.1. How can programmes and policies that increase the capacity of the poor to help themselves be most effectively supported?

2.2. What place do equitable redistributive policies have in poverty eradication?

3.1. Does the fact of generally lower inflation and increased international competition enable greater attention to employment growth in macroeconomic policies?

3.2. What are the most effective ways of increasing self-employment and encouraging growth of small business?

4.1. What policies for reducing discrimination and ethnic conflict have worked most effectively?

5.1. What additional policy initiatives would contribute most to increasing equality between women and men?

6.1. Could the time-bound targets for universal education and the provision of basic health services be strengthened? From what domestic and international sources should additional resources for meeting those targets be sought?

7.1. What policies for accelerating development in Africa and the least developed countries have worked most effectively? What national and international forces can be mobilized to adapt and use such policies in all countries?

8.1. In what ways have structural adjustment programmes been changed since the Summit? Why do some structural adjustment programmes that give little attention to social impact persist? What further changes can be made?

9.1. Has there been an increase in resources allocated for social development or an improvement in the effectiveness with which they are used? If so, what have been the effects? If not, why not and what are the consequences?

10.1. Have the attempts to strengthen the focus and increase cooperation for social development within the United Nations system been effective? What further improvements could be made?

18. Such questions are simply an indication of the subjects that could be discussed. The purpose of the special session, however, is not only to review but also to identify and agree on concrete initiatives for extending and strengthening

action to apply the Summit commitments and achieve its goals. It would therefore be useful for the Preparatory Committee at its organizational session to propose subjects on which background papers should be prepared and on which countries themselves may wish to work.

III. Role of intergovernmental bodies

A. General Assembly

19. As reiterated in the texts adopted at Copenhagen, the General Assembly, as the highest intergovernmental mechanism, is the principal policy-making and appraisal organ on matters relating to the follow-up to the Summit. A three-tiered intergovernmental process to this follow-up consists of the Assembly, through its role in policy formulation, the Economic and Social Council, through its role in overall guidance and coordination, and the revitalized Commission for Social Development.

20. Since the Summit, the Assembly has considered each year an item on its agenda entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development". Annual reports of the Secretary-General describe follow-up activities and actions taken by Governments, the intergovernmental bodies, the Secretariat, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations.

21. In establishing the preparatory process of the special session, the General Assembly decided that the Preparatory Committee would be open to the participation of all States Members of the United Nations and members of the specialized agencies, with the participation of observers in accordance with the established practice of the Assembly; that it will initiate its substantive activities in 1999 on the basis of inputs by the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council; and that it will also take into account contributions by other relevant organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system.

B. Coordination with the Commission for Social Development

22. By its resolution 1996/7 of 22 July 1996, the Economic and Social Council decided that the Commission for Social Development, as a functional commission of the Council, should have the primary responsibility for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the Summit. To fulfil this role, the Commission's membership was enlarged, its meetings annualized and a new structure of its agenda and multi-year programme of work (1997-2000) was established, with the umbrella substantive item of "Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development". The Commission's method of work has also been revised, incorporating panel discussions and non-governmental organization segments to enrich its debates.

23. In addition, in its resolution 51/202, the General Assembly decided that the Commission for Social Development will undertake work in 1999/2000 for the preparations of the special session, in accordance with its programme of work as set out in Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/7.

24. Since the Summit, the Commission has devoted its priority themes to the core issues addressed by the Summit. At its special session in 1996, the theme was "Strategies and actions for the eradication of poverty"; in 1997, it was "Productive employment and sustainable livelihoods", and in 1998, it was "Promoting social integration and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons". For 1999, the Commission will consider two themes: "Social services for all" and "Initiation of the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit". In the year 2000, the Commission will devote its work to "Contribution of the Commission to the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit". Agreed conclusions adopted on these themes have been transmitted to the Council, and are also being transmitted to the Preparatory Committee.

25. At the thirty-sixth session of the Commission for Social Development, in February 1998, several countries were invited to make special presentations on implementation of the outcome of the Summit at the national and regional levels. This practice has proven valuable and should be undertaken on a regular basis.

26. Taking into account the fact that the substantive work of the Preparatory Committee will be conducted on the basis of input by the Commission for Social Development, coordination between these two bodies will be essential. Apart from requesting the Commission to continue to make available to it the reports and decisions adopted that will be relevant to its work, the Preparatory Committee may wish to consider entrusting the Commission with the responsibility of acting as the forum for national and regional reporting, sharing of experience and identification of further initiatives. The comprehensive report containing analyses and assessment of information provided by Governments on implementing the outcome of the Summit (see para. 10 above) could be submitted by the Secretariat

through the Commission for Social Development to the Preparatory Committee in the year 2000.

C. Economic and Social Council

27. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/25, reaffirmed that the follow-up to the Summit will be undertaken on the basis of an integrated approach to social development and within the framework of a coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the results of the major international conferences in the economic, social and related fields.

28. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1997/61 of 25 July 1997, stressed the need to further promote integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of the major international conferences in the social, economic and related fields, and decided to include the question in the agenda of its substantive session on an annual basis. The Council will convene a resumed session from 13 to 15 May 1998 to consider this question; the Preparatory Committee may wish to take into account the results of that session in its request to the Council to contribute to the work of the special session, in particular to ensure that results from the review of other major conferences are coordinated and channelled to the special session process. The Committee may also wish to invite the Council to strengthen its substantive examination of the work of its functional commissions, especially with respect to their agreed conclusions and resolutions.

29. Further, in its resolution 1997/60 of 25 July 1997, the Council decided to carry out in 1999 an overall review of the theme of poverty eradication in order to contribute to the special session for the overall review of the Summit and to the five-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action in the year 2000.

IV. Role of the United Nations system

30. The Summit called for the involvement of most entities of the United Nations system in the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. In its resolutions 50/161, 51/202 and 52/25, the General Assembly renewed its call to all relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to be involved in the follow-up to the Summit, and invited them to strengthen and adjust their activities, programmes and medium-term strategies to take into account the follow-up to the Summit. The Assembly also decided that contributions by all relevant organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system would be taken into account by the Preparatory Committee.

31. Bearing in mind the work of the inter-agency task forces established by the Administrative Committee on Coordination in 1995 on basic services for all, employment and sustainable livelihoods, and the enabling environment for social and economic development, as well as the work of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, to provide system-wide, coherent support to national actions to follow up decisions of recent international conferences in the economic, social and related areas, the Preparatory Committee may wish to invite the organizations of the United Nations system to give priority attention to the implementation of the outputs of those bodies. It may be recalled that their recommendations focus principally on coordination at the national level. They should also be invited to report on their role in the implementation of the outcome of the Summit, and to contribute to the preparatory process of the special session, preferably at the substantive sessions of the Preparatory Committee. Their reports could also contain proposals for innovative ideas and actions. The framework for their reporting could be the 10 commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration as they relate to their mandates and respective area of expertise.

32. The Summit also called for the promotion and strengthening of the coordination of United Nations system activities, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization at the global, regional and national levels in the area of economic and social development programmes, and invited the World Trade Organization to consider how it might contribute to the implementation of the Programme of Action. The Preparatory Committee may wish to reiterate this call and invite the above-mentioned bodies to be actively involved in preparing for the special session.

33. To promote implementation of the outcome at the regional and subregional levels, the regional commissions were invited by the Summit and the General Assembly, in accordance with their mandates and in cooperation with the regional intergovernmental organizations and banks, to convene on a biennial basis a meeting at a high political level to review the progress made towards implementing the outcome of the Summit, to exchange views on their respective experiences and to adopt appropriate measures. Three such meetings have been held, in the Latin America and the Caribbean region, the Asia and Pacific region and the European region. The Preparatory Committee may wish to request the holding of such meetings in the African and Western Asian regions, and to welcome follow-up meetings

in the first three regions. The Committee could also invite the regional commissions to identify and share best practices and lessons learned with respect to the implementation of the Summit outcome at the regional and subregional levels.

V. Role of intergovernmental organizations, civil society, including non-governmental organizations, and other actors

34. In accordance with established practice, intergovernmental organizations are invited to contribute and participate in the work of the special session and its preparatory process.

35. Since the Summit, the General Assembly has consistently reaffirmed the need for effective partnership and cooperation between Governments and the relevant actors of civil society, social partners, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, and has encouraged them to participate in the implementation process related to the Summit to the maximum extent possible. These actors include parliamentarians, trade unions, academic and research institutes, community groups, businesses, religious groups and the media.

36. The Assembly has also requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the preparatory process for the special session benefits from the active involvement of all concerned. The Preparatory Committee should invite organizations of civil society and the private sector to play an active role in the overall process of preparation leading to the special session. Further, the Preparatory Committee may wish to encourage such organizations to hold parallel events. The Committee could also consider encouraging Governments to include representatives of these organizations and groups in their national preparatory processes, as well as in their delegations to sessions of the Preparatory Committee and to the special session itself.

37. To ensure that appropriate arrangements will be made for the contribution and participation by non-governmental organizations in the preparatory process and at the special session itself, the Secretariat has made proposals in a separate note (A/AC.253/2).

VI. Other parallel initiatives

38. In order to enrich the debate and contribute to the preparatory process, the Secretariat is commissioning experts to prepare substantive background papers on selected subjects. The Preparatory Committee may also wish to encourage the organization of expert group meetings/seminars/symposia/workshops on issues of relevance to the special session. These meetings could bring together experts from Governments, academic and other institutions, and could be organized by the Secretariat and the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, or by Governments, non-governmental organizations, and academic and research institutes.

39. The Summit requested the Secretary-General to ensure effective coordination of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the Summit. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/25, requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the preparatory process for the special session benefits from the active involvement of all concerned and that the Secretariat is adequately supported. Within the United Nations Secretariat, the responsibility for preparation for the special session rests with the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In order for the Secretariat to finance these activities, the Committee may wish to encourage contributions to the Trust Fund for the Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development by Governments, intergovernmental organizations, foundations, private enterprises and concerned individuals. It will be recalled that the General Assembly, in its resolution 52/25, invited Governments to contribute to the Trust Fund in support of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the Summit, including the preparation for the special session.

VII. Arrangements for future sessions

A. Preparatory Committee

40. In its resolutions 51/202 and 52/25, the General Assembly decided that the Preparatory Committee will initiate its substantive activities in 1999 on the basis of inputs by the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council.

41. Taking into account the United Nations calendar of meetings for the years 1999 and 2000, in particular the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth sessions of the Commission for Social Development, which will be held from 9 to 19 February 1999 and from 7 to 18 February 2000, the Preparatory Committee may wish to decide that its first and second substantive sessions be convened in New York from

17 to 28 May 1999 and from 3 to 14 April 2000, for a duration of 10 working days each.

B. Special session

42. Drawing on experience from previous special sessions of the General Assembly and the organization of the Summit and other major conferences convened in recent years under the auspices of the United Nations, it is proposed that the special session be held for a period of five working days in order to accommodate the statements of representatives of all States Members, enable interaction with the United Nations system and other organizations, and allow time to reach agreement on concrete initiatives.

43. Based on the calendar of United Nations meetings in the year 2000, in particular the dates of the thirty-eighth session of the Commission for Social Development and the proposed dates for the second substantive session of the Preparatory Committee in the year 2000 (see para. 41 above), the following three options are put forward for consideration by the Preparatory Committee with regard to the dates of the special session:

22 to 26 May 2000

19 to 23 June 2000

28 August to 1 September 2000

An indicative timetable for the preparatory process of the special session in 1999 and 2000 is contained in the annex.

44. Finally, the Preparatory Committee will need to make a decision concerning the level of representation at the special session, bearing in mind that the Summit brought together for the first time in history 117 heads of State and Governments, delegates from 186 countries and a large number of representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the mass media to place social development at the centre of national and international debate and strategies.

VIII. Conclusion

45. It is important to reiterate that the objective of the special session should not be to renegotiate existing agreements contained in the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the Summit. Rather, it should be to provide an opportunity for Governments and other actors in the development process who gather at the General Assembly to adopt concrete measures and identify additional means for implementing the goals set by the Summit, and to renew the political impetus to foster social progress in all societies.

Notes

[1] See International Labour Organization, *World Employment 1996/97: National Policies in a Global Context* (Geneva, 1996).

Annex

Indicative timetable for the preparatory process of the special session in the years 1999 and 2000

Year/month	*Meeting*	*Actions*
9-19 February 1999	Commission for Social Development: thirty-seventh session	Themes: "Social services for all"; "Overall review of implementation of the World Summit for Social Development"
17-28 May 1999	Preparatory Committee: first session	Proposals on agenda for second session of Preparatory Committee; additional documentation
July 1999	Economic and Social Council: substantive session	Overall review of theme of poverty eradication to contribute to special session
October-December 1999	General Assembly: fifty-fourth session	Take stock and provide additional guidance
7-18 February 2000	Commission for Social Development: thirty-eighth session	Proposals to Preparatory Committee on overview of Summit follow-up
3-14 April 2000	Preparatory Committee: second session	Proposals to special session
22-26 May 2000 or 19-23 June 2000 or 28 August-1 September	Special session of the General Assembly	Review of Summit agreements and consideration of further initiatives
July 2000	Economic and Social Council: substantive session	Consider report of Commission for Social Development on its thirty-eighth session
October-December 2000	General Assembly: fifty-fifth session	Consider report of special session